Will Bacteria Go to War?

JAPAN'S SECRET WEAPON. By Barclay Moon Newman. 223 pp. New York: Current Publishing Company.

By M. F. ASHLEY MONTAGU

T was some eighteen years ago —at tea in an English laboratory—that I first heard the idea advanced that in the next war the Germans would probably drop bombs loaded with deadly bacteria upon the civil populations of their enemies. This gruesome prediction seemed not unlikely of realization to those present, although it was the general feeling that the ability of the Allies to do likewise would effectively prevent the Germans from resorting to such an unspeakable piece of criminal folly. The fact is that the whole population of Germany could be wiped out by disease dropped from the skies much more easily than could most other populations of the western world. The latter have the advantage of being more peripherally situated geographically than Germany. It is true, as Voltaire remarked, that while people believe in stupidities they will continue to commit atrocities, but fortunately, as time has proved, the Germans are not so carried away by stupidity as to

In the present little book Mr. Newman sets out to make our flesh creep, to warn us of what he believes to be an imminent danger, namely, relentless onesided bacterial warfare, the secret weapon of Japan. Mr. Newman believes that the threat is real.

commit so fatal a blunder.

There is, indeed, evidence that in China the Japanese have made some experimental attempts to produce epidemics by scattering plague-infected materials from planes. According to an official statement by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (released at Chungking on April 9, 1942), "The reports submitted by Chinese and foreign medical experts definitely prove that on at least five occasions Japan has resorted to ruthless bacterial warfare in China." Mr. Newman is convinced that these were the trials preliminary to large-scale bacterial operations on the part of the Japanese.

HE diabolical inventor under whose this "secret direction weapon" is said to have been developed is Dr. Yoneji Miyagawa of the Government Institute for Infectious Diseases of the Tokyo Imperial University. Miyagawa, according to Mr. Newman, plans to conquer the world by means of his specially developed strains of viruses and bacteria, strains which are lethal and for which no remedy is known. This Mr. Newman terms "oligodynamic warfare," the warfare of the little things-viruses and bacteriaagainst western man. Mr. Newman suggests that in the islands of the Southwest Pacific, from which they have been driven, the Japanese have left far worse things than malaria behind them.

The fact is that apart from the Chinese data there is no evidence whatever that the Japanese terial warfare or that they intend to do so. Mr. Newman's "clues" and "sources of evidence" are. with the one exception referred to, excessively weak, and the conclusions he draws from his interpretation of the "evidence" are, to say the least, strained and extreme. One may say of Mr. Newman's views what Mrs. Henry Adams said of Henry James' "effort" in "A Portrait of a Lady." "He chews more than he bites off." Mr. Newman has, in fact, bitten off very little, but he does a powerful lot of chewing.

HIS is not to say that the Japanese have not considered the possibility of bacterial warfare; they probably have, and it seems to be beyond question that they have tried it on a very small scale in China. Nor is this to say that the Japanese may not try bacterial warfare on a larger scale some time in the future. On that subject our Government is probably as well informed as it can be. Certainly, whatever the truth may subsequently prove to be, the United States and its allies ought to be ready to meet every possible contingency. We must be grateful to Mr. Newman for reminding us of these fearful possibilities, and trust that, for once, he has permitted his emotions to run a little away with him.

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